

AN ADDRESS,

UPON THE OCCASION OF

THE ANNUAL COMMENCEMENT

OF THE

GENERAL THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY,

OF

The Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States;

DELIVERED IN

THE CHAPEL OF ST. PETER'S CHURCH, JUNE 29, 1832.

BY THE

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BISHOP OF THE PROTESTANT EPISCOPAL CHURCH IN THE
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ADDRESS.

HAVING been requested to deliver the customary address on this occasion, I gladly avail myself of the opportunity thus afforded me, to tender my hearty congratulations to the *Trustees and friends of the Seminary*, on the auspicious prospects of the Institution.—From the period of its first organization, I have regarded its prosperity as identified with the best interests of the Church. In its infancy, I had the opportunity of exerting an effective agency in its behalf, by assisting to procure the liberal contributions from South Carolina. At a subsequent period, it fell under my more immediate guardianship, by its temporary location in the diocese of Connecticut. The bequest of its valued benefactor, the late Jacob Sherred, led to its permanent re-establishment in New-York; and the munificence of a living benefactor caused it to be fixed in its present position. The liberal endowments provided for it by the late Frederick Khone, cannot fail to give to it a character of surer permanency, and greatly to enlarge the sphere of its usefulness.

The measures taken by the Church for the education of her youth in Academies, Colleges, and Theological Seminaries, under the auspices of instructors friendly to her institutions, will hereafter be regarded as forming a most important era in her history. The great preponderance of the Presbyterian and Congregational denominations, had led to the almost entire monopoly of the education of the youth of our country, by Seminaries under their control. He who has had an opportunity of observing the influence which the characters and opinions of instructors produce on the minds of their pupils, will cease to wonder that the ranks of our Ministry have been so scantily supplied. He will rather wonder that the Church has continued to exist.—The benefactions which go to the endow-

ment and support of our Colleges and Theological Seminaries, I regard as the highest and most efficacious charities which Churchmen can bestow.

But, in the present state of society, there is a desideratum to be attained, before these institutions can produce the effects of which they are susceptible, in training up a learned and adequate Ministry for our Church. The sacred office holds out few temptations to the lovers of wealth and distinction. And it is deeply to be regretted that a large portion of our youth, who possess the means of acquiring a liberal education, find overpowering inducements, in their situation, and in the circumstances of our country, to shun the humble profession of the Ministry, and to pursue the more ambitious walks of life. No alternative remains, but to look to the less affluent ranks of society, as a resource for the supply of the Church. In these ranks, we may expect to find equal intelligence, and equal virtue ; without that strong propensity to ambitious pursuits, which is so naturally attendant on the possession of wealth. Other denominations of Christians have, for some time, been aware of the difficulty of filling up the clerical profession, arising out of the peculiar circumstances of our country ; and they have taken effectual measures for supplying the deficiency, by educating a class of pious young men, whose station in society will be improved, and their opportunities of usefulness enlarged, by a devotion of their lives to the sacred office. This seems to be the only resource, in a country like ours, where there is no public provision for the support of the clergy, and where there are so many more promising avenues to eminence and wealth. Entertaining these views, I cannot but deem it a paramount object with the Church, to take immediate and adequate measures for educating a body of intelligent and pious young men, selected from the less affluent portion of the community, who may supply her vacant altars, build up her waste places, and disseminate her pure doctrines, worship, and ordinances, throughout our country.

Commending this subject to the deliberate consideration of the Trustees of the Seminary, and the friends of the Church at

large, I now beg leave to offer my congratulations *to the Professors of the Institution*, on the auspicious return of this, its eleventh anniversary, and on the eminent success of their labors in the cause of theological education. Their learning, zeal, industry, and weight of character, aided by the judicious arrangements of the Standing Committee of the Trustees of the Seminary, have conquered the objections arising from its location in an expensive and populous city, and have attracted a goodly number of students to its halls. It gives me unfeigned pleasure to state that, for the past year, fifteen candidates for Holy Orders from the Diocese of Connecticut, and nearly an equal number of the alumni of Washington College, have been enrolled among its members. The examinations which have just been held, have afforded gratifying evidence of the fidelity with which the Instructors have discharged their trusts, as well as of the industry and intelligence of the students. Under such auspices, we may reasonably look forward to the increasing prosperity and usefulness of the Institution;—especially when more adequate provision shall have been made for aiding the education of young men designed for Holy Orders.

But the occasion on which we are assembled admonishes me that I should address myself more particularly to our *younger Brethren*, who have now completed their public course of theological education, and are soon to enter on the responsible duties of the Sacred Ministry. A few remarks on the qualifications required for the successful exercise of that holy office, cannot be unsuited to the present interesting period in their lives. They may be equally applicable to the situation of the remaining pupils of the Seminary, and may perhaps serve to lead the minds of my reverend Brethren, now present, to a train of salutary reflections.

“The Priest’s lips should keep knowledge,” says the prophet Malachi; “for he is the messenger of the LORD of Hosts;” and the people “seek the law at his mouth.” “Every scribe which is instructed unto the kingdom of heaven,” says the Saviour, “is like unto a man that is a householder, which bringeth forth out of his treasure things new and old.” A competent store of

knowledge, therefore, is a primary qualification for the Ministry. To impart this knowledge is the great end for which Theological Seminaries are established. It has long been held as a maxim, that the orator should be well instructed in all the arts and sciences. The same may be said of the Minister of the Gospel.

The first preachers of Christianity were miraculously endued with the gift of tongues, and were divinely inspired with all other knowledge necessary to their calling. But supernatural gifts have ceased, since they are no longer necessary in the Church; and a course of diligent and careful study must now supply the place of inspiration. A liberal education in human learning constitutes a necessary foundation for the successful study of Theology. The science of Theology itself requires long and laborious investigation, for it comprehends all the knowledge which contributes to establish the truth of our religion, which may serve to illustrate its doctrines, or which may aid in commending those doctrines to the understandings and the consciences of men. The sacred Scriptures are the great source and fountain of all religious knowledge; and they should be pondered with diligence and patience, with sincerity and humility, and with fervent prayer. The original languages in which they were composed must be carefully studied, and all the lights of biblical learning must be collected to illustrate the true sentiments and meaning of the inspired writers. A thorough knowledge of the character, and the history of the Jewish nation; its memorable transactions, its policy, laws, manners, customs, and ceremonies, to which such frequent allusions are made by the sacred penmen; an acquaintance with the history of the surrounding nations of which they speak; and an especial knowledge of all the important events connected with the establishment and propagation of Christianity, from the period of the Saviour's appearance on the earth to the present day; all these are essentially necessary to the proper understanding of the holy Scriptures, and to the comprehension of the true import and character of the Christian religion. To convert, or confute the infidel, a profound knowledge of the evidences of Christianity is necessary. An acquaintance with polemic Theology may be useful, in putting

to silence the gainsayer. And to defend the Church against the assaults of other religious denominations, it is necessary to be well acquainted with her distinctive principles, and the reasons on which they are grounded, and to be thoroughly versed in the excellencies of her constitution, discipline, and worship. All this information is not to be obtained without long and arduous study. The instructions of the Theological Seminary afford but an introduction to it. They do but open an unbounded field of knowledge, which is to be afterward more fully explored, as time may be afforded, and as opportunity may be presented.

Think not, however, that I would recommend a display of critical learning, in the exercises of the pulpit, or in the performance of any of the ordinary duties of the pastoral office. The Gospel of salvation is to be taught in all its simplicity. Its great truths are declared to be so plain, that "the way-faring men, though fools, shall not err therein;" and to be written in characters so legible "that he who runs may read." For the purposes of common pastoral instruction, therefore, there is no need of exploring the learned mazes of commentators, and critics, nor of diving into the depths of speculative systems of theology. But the man of God must be thoroughly furnished with sacred learning, that he may himself the more clearly understand the Christian system; that he may be the better able to confute the skeptic and the gainsayer; and that he may be the more "ready always, to give an answer to every man that asketh him a reason of the hope that is in him."

But the great object of the Christian Ministry is to induce men to embrace the way of salvation by JESUS CHRIST. "Go ye into all the world, and preach the Gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned." Such is the tenor of the Saviour's commission to his Apostles, and through them to their successors in the Ministry, in all after ages of the Church—"even unto the end of the world." Now to accomplish this high object of his calling, it is not sufficient that the minister of the Gospel be well instructed himself, in human and sacred learning: he should be able to apply his knowledge success-

fully to the purposes of pastoral instruction : he must be able so to communicate his thoughts to others, as to convince their understandings and affect their hearts. In short, he should be eloquent.

I am aware that an undue value is sometimes ascribed to the eloquence of the pulpit, and that crowds will occasionally be attracted to the house of public worship, by a popular preacher, from the same motives of idle curiosity and love of amusement, which would carry them to the theatre. I am also aware that empty declamation, when set off by a good voice and graceful delivery, not unfrequently passes current, with the multitude, for genuine eloquence. Under the influence of such considerations, I am apprehensive that many of our Clergy, and candidates for Holy Orders, have been induced to regard pulpit eloquence as a mere showy and deceptive act, unworthy of their serious attention. Perhaps, too, the studies of the Theological Seminary, by opening to the student the rich stores of knowledge, may lead him to set an undue estimate upon mere learning, and to regard every other qualification for the sacred office as frivolous and unsubstantial.

But by the eloquence of the pulpit I do not mean a mere frothy declamation. I do not mean the constructing of harmonious periods, adorning them with flowers and imagery, and uttering them with theatrical display, to amuse the fancy. When Aaron, the first high priest, was chosen of God to be an assistant to his servant Moses, and to be his "spokesman unto the people," "I know that he can speak well," was assigned as a reason for his appointment. To "speak well," then, is the Scriptural idea of eloquence. In this sense, Apollos is commended as an "eloquent man," as well as "mighty in the Scriptures."

Fortified by such authority, I do not hesitate to recommend to our candidates for orders, as well as to our clergy generally, a sedulous attention to the composition and style of their discourses, as well as to the cultivation of a forcible and agreeable delivery. Indeed the very end of public discourses from the pulpit supposes a proper regard to these objects ; for how else

shall we expect to convince the understandings, move the affections, and influence the wills of men?

The foundation of all true eloquence must be laid in a thorough knowledge of the subject under discussion. Without possessing this knowledge ourselves, it is impossible that we should ever be able to address ourselves effectually to the understandings of others. The great objects of preaching are to convert sinners to the faith and practice of the Gospel, and to induce Christians to lead a more holy life. Every part of a discourse should be so framed, in regard to sentiment and style, and so enforced by the power of eloquence, as to contribute to these objects. The statement and explanation of a subject should be clear and plain, in a style simple and perspicuous, and delivered in a calm and deliberate manner. The argumentative portions of a discourse, should be sound and clear, and expressed in forcible and earnest language;—free from learned criticism and conceit, if drawn from Scripture; and unincumbered with metaphysical subtleties, if deduced from the common principles of the understanding. Difficulties and objections should not be started for the purpose of showing off the preacher's adroitness in refuting them. Even when introduced under circumstances more creditable to his modesty, it sometimes happens that the objection, from its very novelty, leaves a stronger impression on the minds of the unlearned part of the audience, than the refutation which accompanies it, and creates distressing doubts in tender consciences, where formerly all was peace. Seldom will controversial preaching be found profitable. A congregation is to be preserved from religious errors, not so much by directly combatting those errors, as by a faithful exhibition of the truths that stand opposed to them. I do not mean to say that more direct controversy is always to be excluded from the pulpit. When the error respects a fundamental doctrine of the Christian faith; when it is propagated with a proselyting zeal; and appears to be spreading in the community, it may sometimes be the part of duty to confront it boldly and directly, and to "contend earnestly for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints." Much of religious

controversy, however, is about unimportant questions, which gender strife rather than godly edifying. "The end of the commandment is charity, out of a pure heart, and of a good conscience, and of faith unfeigned."

But the efforts of the Christian minister are not so much taxed to convince men of the truths of the Gospel, as to induce them to embrace the way of salvation which it unfolds, and perform the duties it requires. To this end, all the powers of moral suasion should be exerted, and the strongest appeals should be made to the hearts and the consciences of men. They should be aroused to a consciousness of their lost condition by nature; their affections of love and gratitude to God, should be excited by a lively exhibition of the way of salvation through his Son; their hopes and their fears should be called into action by considerations connected with their everlasting destiny. Their rational powers, indeed, are not to be undervalued, because their feelings and their wills are most readily influenced, by first securing the sanction of their judgment. But man is a complex being, and addresses to his intellect and his passions may often be happily blended together; and he who would exert a commanding influence over his mind, must seek to obtain the concurrence of both.

The appropriate characteristics of the eloquence of the pulpit are gravity and earnestness. The former is naturally dictated by the solemn nature of the subjects of discussion, as well as by the dignity of the ministerial office. The latter is necessary to produce a due effect on the hearer, and is immediately prompted by a consideration of the everlasting interests which are at stake. This gravity and earnestness should be really felt by the preacher; and not assumed for the purpose of commending himself to the admiration of his hearers. The glory of God, and the good of mankind, are the great object and end of preaching. God forbid that any one should so far forget these objects, as to resort to a mere theatrical display, to obtain the applause of men! God forbid that any one should have the presumption to preach himself, instead of preaching "CHRIST crucified!" The legitimate object of pulpit eloquence is to

make men solicitous for the salvation of their own souls ;—not to call forth their admiration of the preacher. But he who entertains a just estimation of the nature of his sacred office, will be alike secure from affectation on the one hand, and from coldness on the other. Penetrated with a deep concern for the souls of men ; with a strong sense of his accountability to the great Head of the Church, whose ambassador he is ; with an awful apprehension of the destiny of everlasting happiness, or everlasting misery, of which he is the minister, his feelings will spontaneously break forth, in the solemnity and earnestness of his manner ; in the expression of his countenance, and the tones of his voice. Nature will dictate what neither art nor imitation can attain. A mysterious sympathy will be propagated from soul to soul, and the bosoms of the audience will be inspired with the same emotions which animate the preacher.

After the foregoing remarks on the subserviency of learning and eloquence to the ends of the sacred ministry, I should feel myself inexcusable if I did not call your attention to a third qualification, more essential than either to the successful discharge of its duties :—I allude to personal piety. It is in vain to think of inspiring others with a love and zeal for religion, unless we feel its influence glow within our own bosom. The mere form of godliness will be unavailing, unless we feel the power thereof. We shall be conscious that we are acting a part ; our own hearts will misgive us ; and we shall not dare to expect, nor shall we ordinarily receive, a divine blessing on our labors. It is true, indeed, that the miraculous power of God may raise a man to life, by the bones of a dead prophet ; and the same gracious Being may sometimes so honor his own holy word, as to make it a savor of life unto life, though it proceed from the lips of an unworthy minister. But this is not in consonance with his general dispensations ; for seldom are reluctant and heartless labors either esteemed of men, or owned and blessed of God. Besides, it is from the depths of a truly pious heart alone, that those sentiments spring up which have the greatest influence on the consciences of men ; and if the saving truths of the Gospel are not garnered up in the affections of the

speaker, he will find it an irksome, and a hopeless task to impress them on the mind of the hearer.

“Without holiness no man shall see the LORD.” But God requires of his ministers a higher degree of holiness than from other men. “For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required;” and the ministers of the Gospel are consecrated and set apart, by the very nature of their office, to high attainments in sanctification and godliness. They are less subjected, than other men, to the temptations of wealth and ambition; and they are less exposed to the allurements of the world. They are required, by the nature of their office, to be more conversant with the Scriptures—to be better acquainted with the duties they require, with the promises which incite to the performance of them, and with the everlasting sanctions by which they are enforced. Their persons and their talents being solemnly consecrated to the services of religion, “Holiness to the LORD,” should be inscribed on the frontlets of their foreheads, and on the tablets of their hearts. They should withdraw themselves from the business, the cares, and the incumbrances of the world, by which secular men are perplexed, and they should strive to emulate the purity and zeal of the holy angels, who are engaged in the same work of love—being “ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation.”